

# Brothers from Another Mother? A Progressive Covenantalist Analysis of 1689 Federalism

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## INTRODUCTION

I've titled this article by using the colloquialism, "Brothers from Another Mother?"<sup>1</sup> As this contemporary idiom is often used, it refers to two people who act so similarly that they must be brothers, yet they look nothing alike, so they must have different mothers. As applied to the two contemporary Baptist covenantal theologies, my basic thesis is that 1689 Federalism and Progressive Covenantalism (PC) are both Baptist brothers, and actually in function (and theological distinctives) end up with many similar conclusions, but they can look so different on the surface. At the risk of being overly simplistic, but for the sake of comparison,<sup>2</sup> my contention is that the mother of *historical theology* birthed the modern-day version of Baptist covenant theology we now commonly call 1689 Federalism. And, similarly, the mother of *biblical theology* birthed PC as a contemporary version of Baptist covenantal theology. These different origins have resulted

in different historical developments, different conversation partners, different ecclesiological settings, and different vocabularies, terminologies, and theological burdens to be protected. The consequence is that (in many cases) many proponents of 1689 Federalism and some proponents of PC, because their respective systems look so different on the surface, are largely talking past each other and often not understanding each other (which is especially the case for 1689 Federalists). It's no coincidence that the leading exponents of 1689 Federalism have PhDs in historical theology, and the leading exponents of PC have PhDs in biblical and systematic theology. There is a disciplinary gap that is not easily crossed at times.

Even the labels that have come to describe these respective Baptist theological proposals illustrate these different origins. Though Baptists have been doing covenantal theology for centuries, the terms 1689 Federalism and PC are of recent vintage.<sup>3</sup> Speaking autobiographically, when I showed up on the campus of Southern Seminary as an MDiv student two decades ago, no one, neither professors nor students were using these theological labels, and they could not be found in print either.<sup>4</sup> I took all of my church history and Baptist history courses with Tom Nettles and Michael Haykin. I fell in love with my historical Baptist heritage and considered the 17<sup>th</sup> century Particular Baptists my theological forefathers. Yet it would be another decade before these burgeoning Baptist covenantal theologies coalesced around this new parlance.

Two landmark works, which have each set the terms of the conversation since their publication released in less than a year from each other. In 2012 Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum published *Kingdom Through Covenant* and articulated a version of Baptist covenantal theology they described as “progressive covenantal” for the first time in print. Although anecdotally I knew of a growing body of students around campus who were already using the term informally to describe the teaching of their professors as early as 2004, it wasn't until *Kingdom Through Covenant* was published that the label became widely known and embraced.

In that first edition, Wellum states that in describing their “kingdom through covenant” proposal as “PC” they recognize that they are “coin[ing]” a new term.<sup>5</sup> He writes, “Even though it is a *new term*, it nicely captures our basic proposal.”<sup>6</sup> Wellum adds, “This view may also be thought of as a ‘Baptist theology’ since we believe that it best provides the grounding

to a Baptist ecclesiology over against other ecclesiologies. However, since our view has more implications than merely that of ecclesiology and since Baptists differ in matters of God's sovereignty, soteriology, and eschatology, 'progressive covenantalism' is probably a more appropriate label.<sup>7</sup> The term indicated that their proposal was not progressive *dispensationalism*, nor was it *traditional* covenantalism. And descriptively, the term PC aptly summarizes that the *progressive* unfolding of God's one redemptive plan through the biblical *covenants* forms the structure of the biblical-theological storyline.

What was a surprise to me at least at the time, was the 2013 publication of the ThM thesis from a French-Canadian Reformed Baptist Pastor. Pascal Denault's *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology* was published in English and soon after given a wider promotion when it was featured on the new website: [www.1689federalism.com](http://www.1689federalism.com).<sup>8</sup> Brandon Adams, the purveyor of the website, coined the term "1689 Federalism" to describe this "new" version of Baptist covenantal theology. A new term was needed to describe this fresh articulation because it stood in contrast to the version of covenant theology held by most other contemporary Reformed Baptists.<sup>9</sup> *1689 Federalism* was the term chosen by those who advocate for this view because they believe they are rearticulating the covenantal (federal) theology that the majority of British Particular Baptists formulated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and that stood behind their seminal doctrinal statement, the 1689 Second London Baptist Confession of Faith.<sup>10</sup>

Besides wanting to survey this background, my point is to highlight how even the respective terminology reflects their origins. 1689 Federalism was birthed as a result of historical retrieval efforts, even to distinguish themselves from other modern Reformed Baptists who articulated a version of covenantal theology that yes, fell within the bounds of the 1689 Confession, and yes, could be found to have some historical precursors, but is now, in light of more historical work, understood not to have been the view of the majority of 17<sup>th</sup> century Particular Baptists.<sup>11</sup> In their polemics with paedobaptists, our 17<sup>th</sup> century forebearers hammered out some covenantal distinctives that were effectively lost for a few hundred years.<sup>12</sup> 1689 Federalism is claiming to be the historical-theological view of the majority of these Baptists, and the nomenclature of the view highlights this historical-theological appeal.

Whereas Gentry and Wellum (and the other contributors to the 2016 publication titled, *Progressive Covenantalism*<sup>13</sup>) were not seeking to make a historical appeal. The subtitle of *Kingdom Through Covenant* makes clear that they are seeking to present a *biblical-theological understanding of the covenants*. It was a contemporary proposal articulated in the context of the two contemporary dominant biblical-theological alternatives, namely dispensationalism and traditional Reformed covenant theology. 1689 Federalism was birthed out of historical retrieval efforts and framed in the context of historical theology. PC was birthed out of the biblical theology movement and framed in the context of contemporary biblical-systematic theology.<sup>14</sup>

So even the labels most commonly associated with each version of Baptist covenant theology highlight their disciplinary differences. They look different on the surface, but with closer examination, they actually function very similarly. Let me provide a few other examples of more substance than just the labels of the views. Here are three areas that have caused some confusion between representatives of the two Baptist covenantal theologies: (1) the positioning, or posturing, of the view as a *via media*; (2) describing the Mosaic Covenant as a works covenant or a gracious covenant; and (3) the bicovenantal framework of the covenants of works and grace.

### ***The Positioning of the View as a “Via Media”***

PC has been positioned or even self-postured as a *via media* between dispensationalism on the one side, and covenant theology on the other side.<sup>15</sup> That has been confusing for some Reformed Baptists, including 1689 Federalists, because they view themselves as holding to covenant theology, and they hear the *via media* language as saying PC is creating some new theological system. Some have called it a sort of theological amalgamation or hybrid mixing together elements of dispensationalism and covenant theology to form some theological chimera.<sup>16</sup> It's the theological systems version of those who say they are a “cal-minian”—some unholy blending together of Calvinism and Arminianism. Well, with that sort of impression, no wonder many 1689 Federalists are not interested in rapprochement efforts or considering our mutual compatibility. And even some Reformed Baptists who have investigated PC more closely and discovered how very similar our views are, are still put off by this *via media* posturing. Sam

Renihan, in his review of *Kingdom Through Covenant*, states that it is a “false dilemma” to reject covenant theology, when what Wellum and Gentry are rejecting is paedobaptism, that is, Presbyterian covenant theology, not necessarily Baptist covenant theology.<sup>17</sup> Another Reformed Baptist pastor has written that it is “false advertising” and even “deceptive” for PC to give the impression that they are equally close to dispensationalism and covenant theology.<sup>18</sup>

However, it was never the intention of PC to give the impression that they are equally close to dispensationalism as they are to covenant theology, at least not in all points of doctrine.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, as it concerns the comparison between these two Baptist covenantal theologies, PC does not mean anything substantially different than 1689 Federalists do when they too employ similar *via media* posturing. A closer examination of this *via media* positioning will illuminate this claim, first in reference to the covenant of grace, then in reference to the Abrahamic covenant.

### ***The Covenant of Grace***

In traditional covenant theology, Reformed paedobaptists appeal to the *substantial* unity of the covenant of grace across the old and new covenants (WCF 7.5–6). Even though the *administration* of the sign of the covenant changes from circumcision to baptism, the *substance* of the covenant remains unchanged so as to continue to include natural descendants in the new covenant just like the old covenant. As a consequence, the *nature* of the covenant also remains unchanged such that its membership is mixed, that is, both regenerate and unregenerate are considered members of the new covenant.<sup>20</sup>

In defending their credobaptism, both Baptist covenantal theologies find this definition (“one in substance, varied in administration”) of the covenant of grace problematic, but they take different turns in their redefinition of the term. PC is content with understanding the covenant of grace as *only* the one saving plan of God.<sup>21</sup> As a comprehensive *theological* category emphasizing the spiritual unity of God’s people across the testaments, they see the term “the covenant of grace” as legitimate.<sup>22</sup> But in order to emphasize the fundamental *newness* of the new covenant and not to cede ground to the paedobaptist argument from *the* covenant of grace, PC opts not to employ

that term when describing the relationship between the covenants, given how it functions in classic covenant theology.<sup>23</sup>

1689 Federalism, on the other hand, retains this terminology, but distinguishes their view from paedobaptist covenant theology by redefining the covenant of grace as *only* the new covenant. The new covenant of grace existed as a promise since Genesis 3:15, was progressively revealed through other historic covenants, and was formally enacted and concluded in the new covenant by the death of Christ. In their respective anti-paedobaptist polemics, both Baptist covenantal theologies intentionally deviate from traditional reformed covenant theology in their definitions of the covenant of grace, but they arrive at similar destinations.<sup>24</sup>

What I want to highlight is that in their respective anti-paedobaptist polemics, both Baptist covenantal theologies each employ a different rhetorical strategy, but they are not mutually exclusive. 1689 Federalism retains the language of “the covenant of grace,” but redefines it. PC sets aside “the covenant of grace” language given how it functions in classic covenant theology to focus on the redemptive promise and how God’s *one* plan of redemption, ordained in eternity and enacted in time, is progressively revealed in multiple covenants culminating in the new covenant.<sup>25</sup> Yet, PC does not reject the *theological* concept of “the covenant of grace” but instead speaks of God’s *one* plan of salvation.

Thus, different burdens stand behind these respective choices. For the 17<sup>th</sup> century Particular Baptists, who were already in a precarious position in terms of public perception of their theology in the midst of the changing winds of English Puritan Separatism, they self-consciously wanted to show common confessional agreement with the Westminster Presbyterians and the Savoy Congregationalists in their doctrinal expressions. Basically, they kept the same confessional language to show an interdenominational unity around orthodoxy.<sup>26</sup> They also did not want to be associated with the radical discontinuity of the Socinians who did not see a unity of salvation across the testaments. So, a continuity of terminology burden was a catalytic for the original 1689 Federalists because of their 17<sup>th</sup> century ecclesiological setting. But for PC, the stronger impulse in their doctrinal formulation leading to the decision for many to set aside “the covenant of grace” terminology is not to cede ground to the paedobaptists. It is the covenant of grace formulation that many paedobaptists keep appealing to in defense of their position,<sup>27</sup> so

to make headway in the baptism conversation, it provides a cleaner slate to work with in conversation to simply focus on what is actually meant by the theological concept. But PC, in continuity with all versions of covenant theology, also wants to avoid the ditch of discontinuity represented in dispensationalism, so they emphasize the one redemptive kingdom plan of God.

Both of these Baptist covenantal theologies are seeking to forge a different path than Reformed paedobaptist covenant theology on the one hand, and Socinianism (in the 17<sup>th</sup> century) or dispensationalism (in our day) on the other hand. It's in this way that the *via media* language is descriptive, not just for PC, but also for 1689 Federalism. Pascal Denault describes the novelty and difficulty that the 17<sup>th</sup> century Baptists faced in attempting to carve out this *via media* in their day. He writes,

Regarding the covenant of grace, the Baptist position was in some ways *midway* between the strict continuity of the Presbyterian position and the radical discontinuity of the Socinians. In agreement with the Presbyterians against the Socinians, the Baptists affirmed the unity of substance of the covenant of grace from Genesis to Revelation. However, like the Socinians against the Presbyterians, they affirmed the discontinuity of substance between the old and the new covenants.<sup>28</sup>

Denault makes a similar point in reference to dispensationalism in stating, “As for the Baptist approach, it allows for the vigorous assertion of the continuity of the covenant of grace and, consequently, the continuity of only one church in both testaments, while simultaneously affirming, in concert with the Bible and the dispensationalists, a discontinuity between the old and the new covenants.”<sup>29</sup> Speaking of Baptist covenantal theology as a “midway” is reminiscent of the positioning of PC as a middle way between (paedobaptist) covenant theology and dispensationalism. By understanding the context and the respective conversation partners, both Baptist covenantal theologies are legitimately positioned as *via media* views, properly understood.

### ***The Abrahamic Covenant***

Related to the prior discussion, their distinctive approach to the Abrahamic covenant puts 1689 Federalism at odds with not just paedobaptist covenant theology, but also (in our day) with dispensationalism. Denault writes,

Understanding the workings of the dualism of the Abrahamic covenant is essential for every theological system. We believe Presbyterian federalism and dispensationalism have failed in this task by confusing the promises of the covenant of grace with the covenant of circumcision. The Presbyterians thereby made the covenant of grace mixed and the dispensationalists assigned a distinct and permanent status as people of God to the physical descendants of Abraham. In both cases, the spiritual and permanent blessings were amalgamated with the earthly and temporary covenant of circumcision.<sup>30</sup>

So, in this way, 1689 Federalism, like PC, is arguing for a distinct theological system (a distinct Baptist covenantal theology) that diverges from and cuts a middle path between both (paedobaptist) covenant theology and dispensationalism.<sup>31</sup> The clear point of departure between each of these theological systems takes place with regard to the Abrahamic covenant. Wellum expresses the same idea in writing, “Ironically, *both* dispensational and covenant theology follow the *same* hermeneutic in appealing to the Old Testament and drawing theological conclusions, yet they do so in *different* areas central to their theological systems.”<sup>32</sup> Elsewhere he continues the point, “Dispensational thought makes [this hermeneutical argument] in regard to the land promise, while [paedobaptist] covenant theology makes it in regard to the genealogical principle, both of which are tied to the Abrahamic covenant!”<sup>33</sup> In contrast to *both* Presbyterian Federalism *and* dispensationalism, 1689 Federalism and PC are positing a middle way between them on the spectrum of continuity/discontinuity between the Testaments.

Even though 1689 Federalists have been troubled at times by the *via media* posturing of PC, proponents mean nothing different by it than what 1689 Federalism proponents mean when they employ the same “middle way” posturing. It is the burden of the historical-theological setting of 1689 Federalism that led them to want to retain the covenant of grace language but redefine it. The burden of the contemporary systematic-theological setting

of PC led their proponents to want to lay aside the language. The same goal animated them both, but their respective settings and conversation partners took them on different routes.

### **DESCRIBING THE MOSAIC COVENANT AS A WORKS COVENANT OR A GRACIOUS COVENANT**

Another area of confusion between these Baptist covenantal theologies concerns the Mosaic covenant. On the surface, it seems like 1689 Federalists and PC are characterizing the nature of the Mosaic covenant in exactly opposite categories. Is the Mosaic covenant a covenant of works or a gracious covenant? Sam Renihan states that for 1689 Federalism “the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works for [temporal] life in the land of Canaan,”<sup>34</sup> whereas Tom Schreiner, who represents PC, clearly states that “the covenant with Israel was gracious.”<sup>35</sup> However, speaking of covenants as being one of “works” or of “grace” can be slippery terms and we can easily talk past each other. It’s important once again to push past superficial differences to understand what is being asserted by these statements and the context in which they were made.

1689 Federalism links the Mosaic covenant with the Abrahamic covenant of *circumcision* and therefore emphasizes the earthly, temporal, and national orientation of these covenants in contrast to how they understand the new covenant (existing as a covenant promise to Abraham) and in distinction from how Westminster Federalism understands the Mosaic covenant (as an administration of the covenant of grace). 1689 Federalism argues that the Mosaic covenant is essentially one of works *because* it is built on the Abrahamic covenant. But that assertion only makes sense in the context of them separating out the multiple seeds of Abraham into two covenants.<sup>36</sup> The Mosaic covenant is linked with the Abrahamic covenant of *circumcision*, and thus together they are simply referred to as the “old covenant.” It’s that *old* covenant (the Abrahamic covenant of *circumcision* and the Mosaic covenant) that together are contrasted with and replaced by the *new* covenant.<sup>37</sup>

When Schreiner, who represents PC, argues for the gracious nature of the covenant with Israel, he is not seeking to communicate that it provides saving grace in itself. The context for these comments is the gracious

redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt in (the stage one) fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. Schreiner is disagreeing with those who might “identify [the covenant with Israel] as a legalistic covenant, as if in this case salvation is based on works.”<sup>38</sup> In arguing that the Mosaic covenant is not legalistic, Schreiner means something similar to what Renihan means when he says that the Mosaic covenant is not *the* covenant of works, by which eternal life can be earned through obedience. Conversely, when Schreiner is maintaining God’s gracious dealings with Israel in the Mosaic covenant, he is saying something similar to what Renihan means when he writes,

The Mosaic Covenant demonstrates God’s kindness and *graciousness* by providing not only a way for Israel to address and redress their sins against the law, but also to teach them in all of this about true forgiveness to be found in a heavenly sacrifice administered by a heavenly High Priest in a heavenly temple. The kindness of the covenant is visible in light of God’s absolute dominion, in light of the Abrahamic promises, and in light of the sacrificial system. The history of Israel is a public record of God’s kindness.<sup>39</sup>

For Renihan, when viewed in light of the new covenant promise to Abraham, God’s continued dealings with Israel were gracious. But when connected to the Abrahamic covenant of circumcision, the old covenant was based on works. Similarly, for Schreiner, when God’s dealings with Israel in the Mosaic covenant are viewed in light of God’s established relationship with Abraham, they must be seen as gracious.<sup>40</sup> But when viewed in an ultimate sense (i.e., eschatological salvation), the Mosaic covenant demands an obedience (works) that sinful man cannot render on his own.<sup>41</sup>

In this “works” and “grace” language concerning the Mosaic covenant, neither Baptist covenantal theology is arguing either that salvation can be earned by obedience to the law (i.e., *the* covenant of works) or that salvation is administered *directly* by the Mosaic covenant (i.e., *the* covenant of grace). In emphasizing the *gracious* nature of the Mosaic covenant, part of what PC is doing is pushing back against the legal and often negative description of the Mosaic law-covenant offered by new covenant theology.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, when 1689 Federalism is emphasizing the *works* nature of the Mosaic covenant, they are pushing back against both Westminster Federalism and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Reformed Baptists who followed their

paedobaptist covenantal mentors.<sup>43</sup> Though their terms and polemical partners are opposite, PC and 1689 Federalism actually arrive in a similar place on this issue with regard to the Mosaic covenant.

### **THE BICOVENANTAL FRAMEWORK OF THE COVENANTS OF WORKS AND GRACE**

The bicovenantal framework of the covenants of works/grace serves to safeguard the central Reformational insight of the law/gospel distinction, which is fundamental to preserving the *ordo salutis* category of justification by faith alone. When some PC advocates choose not to frame their system of theology around this bicovenantal schema, it has confused some in Reformed circles to think we are abandoning a biblical view of salvation. However, PC clearly affirms and has always believed in justification by grace alone through faith alone based on the work of Christ alone.<sup>44</sup> That's why it has also confused PC advocates as to why anyone would ever think otherwise.<sup>45</sup>

Again, here I think the two sides are using terms in different senses. PC is not rejecting this bicovenantal framework as an *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) category. If all that is meant by the covenants of works and grace is another way of summarizing our covenantal union with either Adam or Christ, then PC has no problem with that framework at all.<sup>46</sup> However, PC is arguing that the bicovenantal framework is less useful as a *historia salutis* (history of salvation) category. *Soteriologically* there is one salvation in Christ throughout both the old and new covenants,<sup>47</sup> but *ecclesiologically* there are real differences, especially regarding covenant membership (mixed vs. regenerate-only) and the application of covenant signs (infant circumcision vs. credobaptism) across the covenants.

PC is addressing the covenants of works/grace framework in *only* a redemptive-historical sense (not in a soteriological sense), which it finds less helpful in describing *progressive* revelation. However, it seems that confusion enters into the conversation because traditional covenant theology relies on the bicovenantal schema of the covenants of works/grace to do double duty. Their covenants of works/grace framework serves as both *ordo* and *historia salutis* categories because all of the subsequent covenants after the covenant of works are united in substance as one covenant

of grace. This framework protects the law/gospel paradigm, but it also leads to subsuming all the post-fall covenants under this one covenant of grace. When PC rejects the bicovenantal framework of Reformed paedobaptist covenant theology on *historia salutis* grounds, they also think we are rejecting it on *ordo salutis* grounds, because for them the two categories are linked together.<sup>48</sup>

When it comes to 1689 Federalism, they retain the bicovenantal schema of the covenants of works/grace, because they agree with Reformed covenant theology (and PC!) on the law-gospel distinction and justification by faith alone as an *ordo salutis* teaching. However, they break with traditional Reformed covenant theology in their description of the *historia salutis*. A different *historia salutis* is one of the fundamental distinctives of 1689 Federalism compared with Westminster Federalism. Following John Cameron and John Owen, the original 1689 Federalists recognized that the Mosaic covenant did not neatly fit into one of the two covenantal categories. The Mosaic covenant could not rightly be characterized as either the covenant of works or the covenant of grace.<sup>49</sup> Cameron, whom the 17<sup>th</sup> century Particular Baptists followed and built upon (through Samuel Bolton and John Owen), argued that the Mosaic covenant was a third kind of covenant, which is best described as a *subservient covenant*.<sup>50</sup>

Without previously employing the language of “subservient covenant” (or specifically appealing to Cameron, Bolton, Owen, or Coxe), PC also agrees with the teaching it is meant to communicate in reference to the Mosaic covenant.<sup>51</sup> The Mosaic covenant *subservied* its intended goal which was not to bring salvation itself (as not being either *the* covenant of works or grace), but to lead to Christ and his new covenant work, by preserving the messianic seed, by pointing typologically to Christ through the sacrificial system, and by proving our need for redemption because in our sin we could not perfectly keep the demands of the law.<sup>52</sup>

Sam Renihan argues that the “diversity of Reformed covenant theology largely derived from the interplay of the law and the gospel *dogmatically* with the law and the gospel *historically*. Stated another way, its diversity derived from the relation of the covenant of works and covenant of grace to the old and new covenants.”<sup>53</sup> PC, like 1689 Federalism, wants to affirm a *dogmatic* agreement with Reformed (paedobaptist) covenant theology (i.e.,

*ordo salutis*), but must depart *historically* in how we understand the relation of the old and new covenants (i.e., *historia salutis*).

In light of this clarification, the question that will help bring clarity in the comparison between these two Baptist covenantal views is: what is covenantal theology and the covenantal framework principally aiming to categorize? Dogmatic theology or redemptive history? Systematic theology or biblical theology? In his review article of *Kingdom Through Covenant*, Renihan writes, “The covenant of works and covenant of grace metanarrative is pitted against the metanarrative of progressive covenantalism. That is almost like pitting the chapters of a book against the beginning and end of a book. While classic covenant theology may say that the metanarrative hinges on two covenants, as long as we understand that between the two lies a progression of covenants (as the seventeenth-century Particular Baptists argued), such a dilemma is dissolved.”<sup>54</sup> But I don’t think that 1689 Federalism does consistently dissolve this dilemma, at least I think it does not clearly and consistently communicate the chapters in the book with its prominent focus on the beginning and the end by framing their covenantal system around the covenants of works and grace. Though perhaps to a lesser degree, Steve Wellum’s critique could also be applied to 1689 Federalism’s appeal to the bicovenantal framework when he writes, “What covenant theology does not sufficiently attend to is how the covenants unfold from creation to Christ and how they progressively reveal, predict, and anticipate the coming of Christ and the entire new covenant era.”<sup>55</sup> Jesus is not only the last Adam (1 Cor 15:45), but also Abraham’s true seed (Gal 3:16), the true Israel who obeys completely (Matt 2:15; 3:15–17; 4:1–11), and David’s greater Son (Matt 1:1; Rom 1:3–4). All of these steps are crucial for developing the unfolding story of God’s kingdom through the progression of the covenants.

From the PC perspective, there could be use in the speaking of the covenants of works and grace as *dogmatic* categories to describe the *ordo salutis*. But to describe the *historia salutis*, they lose their usefulness as a *biblical-theological* framework. For the purpose of describing redemptive history, the covenant of works/grace architecture obscures how Scripture unfolds God’s kingdom through the covenants, because it flattens out the progressive unfolding of that plan over time with covenantal development along the way. Again, the question is: what is a covenantal

system of theology chiefly aiming to describe? For PC it is the *redemptive-historical storyline* that we are keen to emphasize and highlight and not allow to be overshadowed by an extra-biblical *dogmatic* framework. We are treating the framework of covenant theology in primarily *historia salutis* categories, which we think better reflects the main ways that the bible itself is unfolding the covenantal framework.

If the subservient covenant is one of the three types of covenants, why don't 1689 Federalists consistently speak of the covenants of works, subservience, and grace, when they frame their covenant theological system? 1689 Federalists have a distinctly Baptist *historia salutis*, especially as it concerns the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants as subservient covenants that are neither *the* covenant of works nor administrations of *the* covenant of grace. Nevertheless, I suspect that these Baptist covenantal distinctives are muted at times in trying to retain the bicovenantal framework of traditional Reformed (paedobaptist) covenant theology.

My chief aim here is to explain what PC means and what it does not mean by not appealing to the bicovenantal framework, and also to explain why we think the framing of the progressive unfolding of redemptive history in terms of the *biblical* covenants is more useful. Once again, I suspect that part of what is underlying this different framing of our respective Baptist covenantal theologies is the 1689 Federalist derivation from *historical* theology, and the PC commitment to *biblical* theology.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I'd like to offer some suggestions for continued rapprochement between these two Baptist covenantal theologies.

First, towards 1689 Federalists, I suggest developing your covenantal theology into a contemporary biblical-theological system apart from (or at least in addition to) historical retrieval. This suggestion certainly does not entail ignoring your confession or the historical sources you have worked to retrieve. However, for 1689 Federalism to be considered an equal player in contemporary theological discourse, it needs to develop into more than merely a historical retrieval project.<sup>56</sup> It also needs to be its own biblical-theological system, which is informed from past labor, but primarily built from exegesis of the text of scripture. And when 1689 Federalists produce that

kind of biblical theology, I further suggest they interact with contemporary theological literature in addition to historical sources. Sam Renihan wrote that PC advocates need “a good dose of Baptist historical theology”<sup>57</sup> to which I agree with him. And I would say the same in return. A good dose of reading in contemporary biblical-theological and exegetical literature might be of great benefit.<sup>58</sup>

Some of the contemporary literature that 1689 Federalists should interact with is dispensational sources. As a byproduct of the historical-theological emphasis and retrieval focus, 1689 Federalism does not interact directly with dispensationalism. There was no dispensationalism in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, so 1689 Federalists can’t draw on our Baptist forebearers for direct help in responding to dispensationalism. I consider this a problem because most Baptists in America today are dispensational. On the other hand, PC has had extensive interactions with the leading dispensational scholars of our day, both in print and in scholarly dialogue at the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS). Most (if not all) of the anti-dispensational polemic that PC has developed and marshalled in defense of a Baptist covenantal reading of the Bible, 1689 Federalism can give full-throated endorsement to and also appropriate for similar ends. We PC advocates are asking our 1689 Federalists brothers to join us in helping move the millions of Baptists in our country towards a covenantal framing of the Bible. But in order to do that, 1689 Federalists must read dispensational literature and interact with their best contemporary arguments.

It would be helpful along these lines for contemporary 1689 Federalists to present regularly at ETS and open up their biblical-theological proposal for scholarly interaction while it’s being developed. Also, to my knowledge there is no full-orbed systematic theology work that has 1689 Federalist distinctives represented. If such a work does not already exist in church history, then no ressourcement effort will fill that lacuna. It will have to be a new contemporary work.<sup>59</sup>

The second suggestion is to leave aside theological cheap shots and name-calling. I don’t see how it helps conversation and mutual understanding. There are two accusations that I’ve heard from Reformed Baptists aimed at PC that I would categorize as theological cheap shots. The first is the accusation that PC is really a form of dispensationalism. I suspect that charge comes because, lined up beside one another on a spectrum of

continuity on the left to discontinuity on the right, I think it would be fair to put PC (slightly) to the right of 1689 Federalism (especially in relation to the role of the law). But PC advocates are not dispensationalists, in fact, dispensationalists themselves are quick to claim as much.<sup>60</sup> And PC certainly doesn't claim to be dispensationalists either. Actually, PC has worked to develop detailed arguments against dispensationalism.<sup>61</sup>

The irony here is that other Reformed Baptists, such as Jordan Steffaniak<sup>62</sup> and Earl Blackburn,<sup>63</sup> have called 1689 Federalism a form of dispensationalism, because again, they would position their version of Reformed Baptist covenant theology further down the continuity side of the spectrum. But this is how these kinds of accusations always work. There is always someone that wants to theologically out-flank you. Greg Bahnsen called Meredith Kline's covenant theology (because of his republicanism) a crypto-dispensationalism!<sup>64</sup> So, covenant theologians also make this accusation against each other. Even many traditional dispensationalists argue that that progressive dispensationalists aren't true dispensationalists, even though they claim to be.<sup>65</sup>

The second accusation that should be left aside is that of antinomianism. Now, I understand why Reformed Baptists have looked at some forms of New Covenant Theology and made that accusation.<sup>66</sup> But that accusation just is not a fair analysis of what PC teaches.<sup>67</sup> PC affirms God's abiding moral law and the helpfulness of the category of natural law,<sup>68</sup> and therefore believe in obeying all of God's laws, including the decalogue, even the fourth commandment.<sup>69</sup> However, PC believes that the decalogue should not be read ahistorically, but should be read according to its covenantal context, and therefore in light of Christ for new covenant believers.<sup>70</sup> The PC disagreement with 1689 Federalism related to the applicability of the law of God across the covenants is primarily hermeneutical, not ethical.

The third closing suggestion I direct towards my PC brothers. In addition to all the wonderful biblical theological literature we love to read, I commend that PC also drinks deeply from the well of historical theology, especially historic Baptist covenant theology. Start with some of the efforts to explain these sources, such as Pascal Denault's *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, then read Sam Renihan's *From Shadow to Substance*. After those read James Renihan's expositions of the First and Second London Baptist Confessions,<sup>71</sup> and then even make your way through the Coxe/

Owen volume on *Covenant Theology from Adam to Christ*.<sup>72</sup> These works will not only give an increased appreciation for the context and theological distinctives of our Particular Baptist forefathers, but also provide a more nuanced understanding of the claims of 1689 Federalism. My experience has been that a greater understanding of each Baptist covenantal theology reveals more to appreciate than to critique. A sympathetic comparison also reveals the complementary role they can serve in developing a contemporary articulation, with historical grounding, of a consistent Baptist covenantal theology. 1689 Federalism is strong where PC has been weaker so far, in historical theology, especially historic Baptist covenantal theology. But similarly, PC has been strong where 1689 Federalism has been weaker, in biblical-theological development, especially taking advantage of the many advancements over the last few hundred years.<sup>73</sup> I don't view 1689 Federalism and PC as mutually exclusive. There are still differences and I don't want to paper over them,<sup>74</sup> but I think we can serve each other best when we extend Christian charity to understand and learn from each other. I hope that will occur for many years to come.

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- <sup>1</sup> This paper was originally presented during the 2023 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in San Antonio, TX during a session dedicated to the subject of Baptist Covenant Theology. I presented the PC position interacting with 1689 Federalism, Daniel Scheiderer presented the 1689 Federalist position interacting with PC, while Harrison Perkins presented a paper giving a Presbyterian response to both Baptist covenantal theologies. These three presentations were followed by a panel with these participants, joined by Stephen Wellum and Robert Howell, with Oren Martin moderating. The colloquial nature of the original presentation is retained in this published version. To my knowledge this was the first time that there has been a dedicated session on the topic of Baptist Covenant Theology at ETS, and even though there have been many sessions over the last decade dedicated to PC, I do not believe that there has ever been a presentation dedicated to 1689 Federalism.
  - <sup>2</sup> For a more detailed comparison between these two views, see Richard J. Lucas, "The Past and Future of Baptist Covenantal Theology: Comparing 1689 Federalism and Progressive Covenantalism," *SB/T* 26.1 (2022): 116–63. Portions of that essay appear here with permission.
  - <sup>3</sup> I detail some of this history in Lucas, "The Past and Future of Baptist Covenantal Theology," 116–22. The first time the term "progressive covenantalism" was put in print was in 2012 by Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 24. Roughly a year later Brandon Adams coined the term "1689 Federalism" when he launched the website by the same name in June of 2013.
  - <sup>4</sup> I began my MDiv studies on the campus of Southern Seminary in the Fall of 2003, moved away from Louisville in 2011 (before *Kingdom Through Covenant* was published), and graduated with the PhD in 2014.
  - <sup>5</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 24.
  - <sup>6</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 24n7 (emphasis added).
  - <sup>7</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 25n8.

- <sup>8</sup> Pascal Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology: A Comparison between Seventeenth-Century Particular Baptist and Paedobaptist Federalism* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2013). A revised edition was released in 2017. References in this article follow the revised edition. The basic argument of the book is also summarized in Pascal Denault, “By Farther Steps: A Seventeenth-Century Particular Baptist Covenant Theology” in *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage: Essays in Baptist Covenant Theology*, ed. Richard C. Barcellos (Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2014).
- <sup>9</sup> When the website 1689federalism.com first launched, it featured various videos and diagrams comparing 1689 Federalism with competing biblical-theological views, such as: Westminster Federalism, Dispensationalism, New Covenant Theology and Progressive Covenantalism. It also initially included a video and diagram on “1689 Federalism vs. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Reformed Baptists.” It has since been removed because of the division it created in the Reformed Baptist community, but the terminology has stuck for contrasting the dominant view among Reformed Baptists before the mainstreaming of 1689 Federalism.
- <sup>10</sup> The claim is not that the 1677/89 Second London Baptist Confession of Faith itself articulates the distinctives of 1689 Federalism, but that this version of Baptist covenantal theology was the majority view of the Baptists who first embraced this confessional document, and it was also the view of the main architect of that confession, namely Nehemiah Coxe. See Nehemiah Coxe, *A Discourse of the Covenants That God made with Men before the Law* (London: John Darby, 1681), which has been republished along with John Owen’s discussion of the Mosaic Covenant from his Hebrews commentary in Nehemiah Coxe and John Owen, *Covenant Theology from Adam to Christ*, eds. Ronald D. Miller, James M. Renihan, and Francisco Orozco (Owensboro, KY: RBAP, 2005). One need not necessarily embrace 1689 Federalism to also hold to the 2LCF as their confessional standard. But 2LCF 7.3 does intentionally deviate from WCF 7.5–6 in not describing the covenant of grace as one in substance across the Old and New Testaments.
- <sup>11</sup> In addition to Denault’s *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, the work by Samuel Renihan has been crucial for demonstrating the historical pedigree of this distinctive Baptist version of covenantal theology which is now commonly referred to as 1689 Federalism. See especially his published dissertation, Samuel D. Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance: The Federal Theology of the English Particular Baptists (1642–1704)* CBHHS 16 (Oxford: Regent’s Park College, 2018). He has also provided (what is essentially) a summary of his dissertation thesis in Samuel D. Renihan, “Above and Beyond: Seventeenth-Century Particular Baptist Covenant Theology,” *SBJT* 26/1 (Spring 2022): 90–114.
- <sup>12</sup> James M. Renihan proposes a few of the factors that led to this essential loss of the Baptists’ covenantal roots in his “Introduction” in *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage: Essays in Baptist Covenant Theology*, ed. Richard C. Barcellos (Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2014), 13–18.
- <sup>13</sup> Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker, eds., *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016).
- <sup>14</sup> As representative of this contemporary biblical theology movement, see T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity and Diversity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000). Cf. also, Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948).
- <sup>15</sup> Many examples could be provided, but simply consider the subtitle for Wellum and Parker’s edited volume, *Progressive Covenantalism*, which is “*Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies*.”
- <sup>16</sup> Blackburn calls PC “a mongrel hybrid between Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism.” Earl M. Blackburn, *It Pleaseth the Lord to Make a Covenant of Grace: A Critique of 1689 Federalism* (Elkin, NC: Veritas Heritage Press, 2023), 10.
- <sup>17</sup> Samuel D. Renihan, “Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theology Understanding of the Covenants, A Review Article” *JRBS* (2014), 163.
- <sup>18</sup> Andrew Lindsey, “Progressive Covenantalism: A Reformed Baptist Reflection.” May 16, 2016, <http://alindsey4.blogspot.com/2016/05/progressive-covenantalism-reformed.html>.
- <sup>19</sup> For more evidence that PC is closer theologically to traditional covenantalism than to any form of dispensationalism, see the interaction among the contributors in Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas, eds., *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022).

- 20 Reformed covenant theology posits that the unregenerate are only members of the *external administration* of the covenant of grace, not the *internal essence*. Nevertheless, the infant children of professing parents receive the sacrament of baptism (as they understand it) because they are considered members of the covenant of grace (see WLC 166 and HC 74). For a further description of how Reformed covenant theology understands the “newness” of the new covenant, see Scott R. Swain, “New Covenant Theologies” in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*, eds. Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 559–69.
- 21 Wellum plainly states that “progressive covenantalism does not deny the theological concept of ‘the covenant of grace’ if one merely means ‘the one plan of God.’” Stephen J. Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism” in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies*, eds. Parker and Lucas, 82.
- 22 Wellum issues this clarification in writing, “If we are not careful, however, the notion of the ‘covenant of grace’ may be misleading, because Scripture does not speak of only one covenant with different administrations. Rather, Scripture speaks in terms of a *plurality* of covenants (e.g. Gal 4:24; Eph 2:12; Heb 8:7–13), which are all part of the progressive revelation of the one plan of God that ultimately is fulfilled in the new covenant. In reality, the ‘covenant of grace’ is a comprehensive *theological* category, not a biblical one. This does not mean that it is illegitimate. In theology we often use theological terms that are not found specifically in Scripture (e.g., the Trinity). If the theological category, ‘the covenant of grace,’ is used to underscore the unity of God’s plan of salvation and the essential spiritual unity of the people of God in all ages, it is certainly helpful and biblical. But if it is used to flatten the relationships and downplay the significant amount of progression between the biblical covenants, which then leads us to ignore specific covenantal discontinuities across redemptive-history, then it is unhelpful, misleading, and illegitimate.” Stephen J. Wellum, “Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants,” in *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 126–27 (emphasis original).
- 23 Again, Wellum proposes that “In order to make headway in the baptismal divide and think biblically regarding the relationships between the covenants, we should place a moratorium on ‘covenant of grace’ as a category when speaking of the biblical covenants and the relationships between them. In its place, let us speak of the one plan of God or the eternal purposes of God centered in Jesus Christ, for that is what the language of the ‘covenant of grace’ is seeking to underscore.” Wellum, “Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants,” 127.
- 24 Wellum writes, “is Genesis 3:15 the ratification of the covenant of grace or is it a gracious promise that God will provide a Redeemer that is finally realized in Christ and the new covenant? It is better to say that Genesis 3:15 is a Christological promise that prophetically anticipates and predicts in seed-form the ultimate provision of the new covenant, which is progressively revealed through the covenants.” Stephen J. Wellum, “A Progressive Covenantalism Response” in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture*, eds. Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2022), 206.
- 25 That’s not to say that someone holding to PC couldn’t make use of the covenant of works/grace framework if they chose to. Again, the point is about how the covenant of works/grace functions in one’s overall theology and specific theological conclusions.
- 26 See Michael A. G. Haykin, *Kiffen, Knollys, and Keach: Rediscovering our English Baptist Heritage*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Peterborough, Canada: H&E Publishing, 2019), 103–37. The letter appended to the front of the 2LCF also indicates this intention. It is reprinted in James M. Renihan, *To the Judicious and Impartial Reader: A Contextual-Historical Exposition of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith*, Baptist Symbolics Volume 2 (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2022), 23–26.
- 27 See the various appeals to the covenant of grace to argue for paedobaptism in Gregg Strawbridge, ed. *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003). This argument is also documented in Wellum, “Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants,” 97–124.
- 28 Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 50.
- 29 Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 82n67.
- 30 Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 125.
- 31 Jeff Johnson also clearly positions (his) 1689 Federalism as a third, middle covenantal and hermeneutical system between Presbyterian covenant theology (on the *continuity* side of the spectrum) and dispensationalism (on the *discontinuity* side of the spectrum). See Jeffrey D. Johnson, *The Kingdom of God: A Baptist Expression of Covenant and Biblical Theology* (Conway, AR: Free Grace Press, 2014), 17–31.
- 32 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 141–142, emphasis original.
- 33 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 100.

- <sup>34</sup> Samuel Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ: His Covenant and His Kingdom* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2019), 110.
- <sup>35</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Covenant and God's Purpose for the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 72.
- <sup>36</sup> For the dichotomous nature of the Abrahamic covenant, see Jeffrey D. Johnson, "The Fatal Flaw of Infant Baptism: The Dichotomous Nature of the Abrahamic Covenant," in *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage: Essays in Baptist Covenant Theology*, ed. Richard C. Barcellos (Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2014), 223–56; and idem., *The Fatal Flaw of the Theology Behind Infant Baptism* (Conway, AR: Free Grace Press, 2010). While it does seem to be the majority position of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Particular Baptists to express this dualism in the Abrahamic covenant as representing two covenants, not all modern day 1689 Federalists follow suit. See the discussion of the Abrahamic covenant in Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 87–101.
- <sup>37</sup> Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 116–29. Renihan summarizes the historical development that led to this theological conclusion in writing, "The Particular Baptists' distinctive feature was that they applied the same hermeneutical principles to the Abrahamic covenant that Cameron and Owen had applied to the Mosaic covenant, calling it a covenant of works" (*From Shadow to Substance*, 324–325). Elsewhere Renihan describes his own view by writing, "This [Abrahamic] covenant can be classified as a covenant based on works, or obedience" (*The Mystery of Christ*, 94).
- <sup>38</sup> Schreiner, *Covenant and God's Purpose for the World*, 59. He states elsewhere that "by legalism I refer to the idea that human beings can earn or merit right standing with God." Thomas R. Schreiner, *40 Questions About Christians and Biblical Law* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2010), 25. See his fuller answer to the questions, "Was the Mosaic Covenant Legalistic?" and "Does the Old Testament Teach that Salvation is by Works?" on pp. 25–31.
- <sup>39</sup> Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 115, emphasis added. Cf. also when Schreiner writes, "We also see the graciousness of the [Mosaic] covenant and the need for atonement in the sacrifices that were offered for the cleansing of sin . . . The covenant, then, provided a means by which Israel could maintain fellowship with God . . . Israel's covenant fellowship with God was not dependent on perfect obedience, since sacrifices could be offered for covenant violations" (*Covenant and God's Purpose for the World*, 65).
- <sup>40</sup> Schreiner, *Covenant and God's Purpose for the World*, 59–61.
- <sup>41</sup> Elsewhere Schreiner writes, "The contrast between law and promise is explained further, where it is clear that Paul does not think that the addition of the Mosaic covenant constitutes a clarification of the covenant with Abraham. They are fundamentally opposed in that the inheritance is obtained through obedience to the law under the Mosaic covenant, whereas it is given through a promise of God under the Abrahamic." Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 232.
- <sup>42</sup> See Thomas R. Schreiner, "Review of *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense*" *SBJT* 7.4 (Winter 2003): 94–96; Also, Jason C. Meyer, "The Mosaic Law, Theological Systems, and the Glory of Christ" in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies*, eds. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 78–79. In his critique of John Reisinger's work, Meyer describes discovering "an attitude toward the law that still felt lukewarm at times and cold as ice at other times in so-called new covenant theology" (78). Cf. again Wellum's comments distinguishing PC and new covenant theology in Stephen J. Wellum with Brent E. Parker, "Introduction" in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies*, eds. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 3. He includes among the NCT ideas that PC does not endorse as: "the old covenant was not gracious."
- <sup>43</sup> Walt Chantry is representative of the views of 20<sup>th</sup> century Reformed Baptists when he writes, "Every biblical covenant after the fall is revealed by God as a form of the Covenant of Grace." He continues, "It is because all biblical covenants since the Fall are united in their major feature of grace and major requirement of the principle of faith in man that our confession speaks as it does. All biblical covenants (with Adam after the Fall, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, New) are but varying administrations of the Covenant of Grace." Walter J. Chantry, "The Covenants of Works and of Grace" in *Covenant Theology: A Baptist Distinctive*, ed. Earl M. Blackburn (Pelham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2013), 108.

- 44 Three of the five contributors to the recent Five Solas Series (Zondervan), including the editor, are advocates of progressive covenantalism. See Thomas Schreiner, *Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015); Stephen Wellum, *Christ Alone: The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017); Matthew Barrett, *God's Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016). Wellum and Schreiner have been cited elsewhere in this essay as proponents of PC. For Barrett's sympathies, see Matthew Barrett, "What is So New About the New Covenant? Exploring the Contours of Paul's New Covenant Theology in 2 Corinthians 3," *SBJT* 19.3 (2015): 61–96. He writes, "the discerning reader will notice how the conclusions reached in this article will sympathize with 'progressive covenantalism'" (84n7). Editor's note: Matthew Barrett has since renounced PC and instead embraced Anglican covenant theology.
- 45 See Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, "Responses Rejoinder to Review of *Kingdom Through Covenant*," *WTJ* 76.2 (Fall 2014): 449–52.
- 46 For a fuller PC discussion on these bicovenantal categories, see Stephen J. Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," *SBJT* 26.1 (2022): 164–87. In reference to the covenant of works, Wellum writes, "For the most part, progressive covenantalism agrees with covenant theology's understanding of the covenant of works over against dispensationalism's rejection of it (along with some forms of new covenant theology). We agree that Adam was created as the legal, covenant representative of humanity. In addition, we agree that Adam was created good, but not yet glorified, and he, due to the demands and promises of the covenant, was called to obey God perfectly to enter his rest just as God had rested, which means to enter a glorified, permanent state" (175). And of particular interest for the comparison of these two Baptist covenantal theologies, Wellum writes in reference to the covenant of grace that "if the theological category of 'the covenant of grace' is retained, it would be better to identify it with the new covenant, as 1689 Federalism does. Yet, given the diverse understandings of 'the covenant of grace' and how it often assumes a Reformed paedobaptist covenant theology, progressive covenantalism does not see the need to retain the language but instead speak of God's one redemptive plan unfolded through the biblical covenants which reach their fulfillment, *telos*, and terminus in the new covenant" (187n26).
- 47 In this sense, PC can agree with WCF 8.6 (and 2LCF 8.6), which reads, "Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after his incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof were communicated unto the elect, in all ages successively from the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices, wherein he was revealed, and signified to be the seed of the woman which should bruise the serpent's head; and the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world; being yesterday and today the same, and forever." And of course, this historical outworking of salvation is "founded in that eternal covenant transaction that was between the Father and the Son about the redemption of the elect" (2LCF 7.3).
- 48 See the confusion around these category distinctions represented in Jonathan M. Brack and Jared S. Oliphint, "Questioning the Progress in Progressive Covenantalism: A Review of Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom Through Covenant*," *WTJ* 76 (2014): 189–217.
- 49 Renihan writes, "Cameron's threefold covenant model taught that the Mosaic covenant was neither the covenant of works made with Adam nor the covenant of grace, but a distinct covenant of obedience given to Israel concerning life in Canaan" ("Above and Beyond," 96–97).
- 50 For a detailed discussion of this historical development, see Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance*, 48–57, 195–264.
- 51 See Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 93–95.
- 52 Cf. Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 141.
- 53 Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance*, 66, emphasis added.
- 54 Samuel D. Renihan, "Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theology Understanding of the Covenants, A Review Article" *JIRBS* (2014), 164.
- 55 Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," 177.
- 56 As evidence that 1689 Federalism, despite protests otherwise, is not considered an equal player in the discussion around contemporary biblical-theological systems, note its absence from these works (but the inclusion of progressive covenantalism): Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas, eds., *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022); Benjamin L. Merkle, *Discontinuity to Continuity: A Survey of Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020); Chad O. Brand, *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views* (Nashville TN: B&H, 2015). In reference to this last volume, see the critique of the presentation of PC in Brent E. Parker, "Review of *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views*" *SBJT* 20.1 (Spring 2016): 170–74.
- 57 Renihan, "Kingdom Through Covenant," 166.

- 58 Renihan's *The Mystery of Christ* is the closest work to attempting a contemporary biblical theology from a 1689 Federalist perspective. While I'm thankful to see several positive references to some PC literature in that work, it not only has many more references to historic Baptist sources, but hardly any references to contemporary biblical-theological scholarly sources. I suspect that was not the aim of the work, nevertheless, 1689 Federalism would be helped by the appearance of a robust contemporary biblical theology. While 1689 Federalism has not produced a work like the one I'm suggesting, there are numerous examples of contemporary Reformed covenant theology projects, such as: Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether, eds., *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020); Richard P. Belcher, Jr., *The Fulfillment of the Promises of God: An Explanation of Covenant Theology* (Ross-shire, UK: Mentor, 2020); Stephen G. Myers, *God to Us: Covenant Theology in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: RHB, 2021); and Harrison Perkins, *Reformed Covenant Theology: A Systematic Introduction* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2024).
- 59 A systematic theology that has progressive covenantal distinctives represented is currently in development. See Stephen J. Wellum, *Systematic Theology: From Canon to Concept, Volume One* (Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2024).
- 60 As representative of dispensational critiques of PC, see Michael J. Vlach, "Have They Found A Better Way? An Analysis of Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom Through Covenant*," *MSJ* 24/1 (Spring 2013): 5–24; Craig Blaising, "A Critique of Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom Through Covenant*: A Hermeneutical-Theological Response," *MSJ* 26/1 (Spring 2015): 111–27; Michael Grisanti, "A Critique of Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom Through Covenant*: An Old Testament Perspective," *MSJ* 26/1 (Spring 2015): 129–37; and Darrell L. Bock, "A Critique of Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom Through Covenant*: A New Testament Perspective," *MSJ* 26/1 (Spring 2015): 139–45.
- 61 As but two examples, see Richard J. Lucas, "The Dispensational Appeal to Romans 11 and the Nature of Israel's Future Salvation," in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies*, eds. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 235–53; and Oren R. Martin, "The Land Promise Biblically and Theologically Understood" in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies*, eds. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 255–74.
- 62 Jordan L. Steffaniak, "Reforming Credobaptism: A Westminster Alternative for Reformed Baptist Identity," *JBTS* 4.2 (2019): 297.
- 63 In his critique of 1689 Federalism, Blackburn claims that republicationism (which he attributes to 1689 Federalism) "has latent within it incipient dispensationalism" (*It Pleas'd the Lord to Make a Covenant of Grace*, 46).
- 64 Greg Bahnsen calls Meredith Kline's covenant theology (specifically his republicationism) "the functional equivalent of dispensationalism." *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), 122.
- 65 Mark Snoeberger writes, "I would suggest that progressive dispensationalism has lost sight of the reason for and essence of the dispensational system as it was originally conceived" ("Traditional Dispensationalism" in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture*, eds. Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2022), 152n9. See also, Bruce A. Baker, "Is Progressive Dispensationalism Really Dispensational?" in *Progressive Dispensationalism: An Analysis of the Movement and Defense of Traditional Dispensationalism*, ed. Ron J. Bigalke Jr. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005), 343–75; and Charles C. Ryrie, "Update on Dispensationalism" in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, eds. Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 15–27.
- 66 For a prominent, yet troubling NCT presentation of the law, see Steve Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* (Self-published, 2006). For a Reformed Baptist critique of New Covenant Theology's view of the law, see Richard C. Barcellos, *In Defense of the Decalogue: A Critique of New Covenant Theology* (Enumclaw, WA: WinePress Publishing, 2001); cf. also idem., *Getting the Garden Right: Adam's Work and God's Rest in Light of Christ* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2017).
- 67 For the purposeful attempts to distance PC from new covenant theology, see Wellum with Parker, "Introduction" in *Progressive Covenantalism*, 2–3; and Meyer, "The Mosaic Law, Theological Systems, and the Glory of Christ", 78–79. Cf. also Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum, "A Response to Zaspel's Review." November 27, 2012, <https://credomag.com/2012/11/a-response-to-zaspels-review-peter-gentry-and-stephen-wellum>.

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- 68 For the development of a natural law ethic through the framework of PC, see Andrew T. Walker, “Ethics Through Covenant: A Primer on Progressive Covenantalism and Moral Theology (Part 3)” in *Christ Over All* (October 2023), <https://christoverall.com/article/concise/ethics-through-covenant-a-primer-on-progressive-covenantalism-and-moral-theology-part-3>.
- 69 For the PC view of the Sabbath, see Thomas R. Schreiner, “Good-bye and Hello: The Sabbath Command for New Covenant Believers” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies*, eds. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 159–88; Craig L. Blomberg, “The Sabbath as Fulfilled in Christ” in *Perspectives on the Sabbath: 4 Views*, ed. Christopher John Donato (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011), 305–358; D. A. Carson, ed. *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); Andrew David Naselli, “What is a Biblical Theology of the Sabbath?” in *40 Questions About Biblical Theology*, eds. Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2020), 257–265; Schreiner, *40 Questions About Christians and Biblical Law*, 209–217; Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism and the Doing of Ethics,” 232; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 797; Stephen Wellum, “3 Reasons Sunday Is Not the Christian Sabbath.” October 27, 2020, [www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/sunday-not-christian-sabbath](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/sunday-not-christian-sabbath).
- 70 See Stephen J. Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism and the Doing of Ethics” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies*, eds. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 225–226; and idem., Stephen Wellum, “The Law of God” in *TGC Concise Theology* (2020), [www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-law-of-god](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-law-of-god). Cf. also Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 782–98.
- 71 James M. Renihan, *For the Vindication of the Truth: A Brief Exposition of the First London Baptist Confession of Faith*, Baptist Symbolics Volume 1 (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2021).
- 72 For more primary source works, see the 17 volume “Baptist Covenant Theology Collection” available on Logos.com. Baptist Heritage Press is also another new effort to republish Particular Baptists works.
- 73 See the bibliography in the first edition of Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 779–809.
- 74 The most obvious example is the role of the Decalogue in new covenant ethics, and specifically the abiding validity of the sabbath day command.